

# The European School and the Group of Abstract Artists

PÉTER GYÖRGY AND GÁBOR PATAKI

*The European School (Európai Iskola) came into being in October 1945, at the beginning of a brief, amorphous period immediately following the end of the Second World War, when the Soviet takeover and the concomitant strictly-limiting cultural policy was not yet in place. Among the founders were art critics Árpád Mezei, Imre Pán, Ernő Kállai, and Lajos Kassák as well as physician and art collector Pál Gegesi Kiss. Pán summarised their programme as follows: 'Europe and the old European ideals are in ruins ... A new Europe can only emerge out of the synthesis of West and East ... We need to create a living European school giving shape to the new relation between life, the individual, and the community'.<sup>1</sup>*

*In 1945, the group was full of hope for a new beginning. Its theorists and artists were reaching back to the modernist tendencies of the interwar years; some of them had been members of Kassák's Munka Circle (Munka Kör) in the late 1920s. The painters (Margit Anna, Jenő Barcsay, Endre Bálint, Béla Czóbel, József Egrý, Jenő Gadányi, Tihamér Gyarmathy, Dezső Korniss, Tamás Lossonczy, Ödön Márffy, Ferenc Martyn, Ernő Schubert, Piroska Szántó) and sculptors (Lajos Barta, Dezső Bokros Birman, Erzsébet Forgács-Hann, József Jakovits, Tibor Vilt) found inspiration in artistic trends like Fauvism, Constructivism, and Surrealism. The members organised exhibitions (thirty-eight during their three-year existence), lectures, and debates as well as authored books, reviews, and pamphlets. They also arranged for showing foreign artists; the exhibitions of Paul Klee and the Czech Surrealists were realised upon their initiative.*

*Although the group's name contains 'school', this rather denoted a shared intellectual approach among artists with differing styles and artistic concepts. Surrealism or abstraction was a frequent response to the horrors of the war, and an exclusively abstract direction was considered within the European School, too. Those opting for this form of expression splintered and, under the leadership of theorist Ernő Kállai, founded the Gallery of the Four Directions (Galéria a Négy Világtájhoz).*

*The essay 'Between the Ramparts: The Critical Reception of the European School and the Gallery to the Four Directions' reconstructs the press debates on art between 1945 and 1948. These public contests well reflect the dynamism and undecidedness of those four years, before the Zhdanov Doctrine subordinated cultural policy to the party line and made Socialist Realism the only acceptable artistic expression. The second text, 'Broken Dolls', inserts the artistic programme and activities of the European School and the Gallery to the Four Directions into a broader East-Central-European context. Both pieces are chapters from the monograph *Az Európai Iskola és az Elvont Művészek Csoportja* (Budapest: Corvina, 1990). (BH)*

## **The European School and the Group of Abstract Artists**

### **Between the Ramparts:**

#### **The Critical Reception of the European School and the Gallery of the Four Directions**

In order to provide a veritable picture of the role played by the European School (Európai Iskola) and the Gallery of the Four Directions (Galéria a Négy Világtájhoz) in Hungarian post-war art, outlining the political situation from 1945 to 1948 by means of evidence from the contemporary press appears to be a correct strategy.

The media dedicated a relatively large amount of space to the fine arts, with papers reviewing almost all contemporary exhibitions and publishing texts engaging in theoretical ruminations or even polemics. This increased interest was partly justified by the abundant opportunities and new tasks Hungarian fine arts were newly presented with, as well as by the many urgent questions these raised. In actual fact, it was often broader issues that exerted tension in the background to such artistic debates. The participants—art historians, critics, and politicians—were not merely expressing their opinions on the interpretation and analysis of non-figurativity, but at the same

time they were discussing the future path of Hungarian art, and, in doing so, they went beyond immediate concerns of art theory and policy to a dialogue on the possible fate of the nascent Hungarian democracy. From the turn of 1947 and 1948, such dialogue gradually gave way to regrettably-final statements and judgements.

Accordingly, in the writings, subjective aesthetic reflections came to be mixed with covert and (from 1947 onwards) overt political expositions and attacks, often evidently tied to the cultural policy of a political party. At the start of this era, the topic of abstract versus non-abstract art arose, together with theories explaining or advancing the given tendency, primarily discussed in artistic-aesthetic terms. Later, however, and parallel to the upheavals in cultural and public life, all this became a pretext, allowing participants to express their own (or their party's) cultural policy ideas against those of their opponents. In this context, Ernő Kállai and other theorists affiliated with the European School could only wage a rear-guard action: the demagogic question 'whether abstraction is justified in a people's democracy' offered easy spoils when it came to the European School and the Gallery of the Four Directions.<sup>2</sup> The European School and the Gallery of the Four Directions unwittingly became a foil for an increasingly intolerant critical machinery to level measured blows at modern art and thus to demonstrate their own ideological loyalty. In this context, the reception of the European School and the Gallery of the Four Directions increasingly became a function of the gradual changes in cultural policy and political expectations towards the fine arts.

In 1946, many were still full of hopes and expectations; at this point it seemed that it was going to be the artists themselves who would have the final say over disputed issues. In general, the new art was well received by critics.<sup>3</sup> It still appeared sufficient to ward off the occasional savage attack with 'a gentle response to a sharp tongue'.<sup>4</sup> Even the following year seemed to be a battle between equal forces. This year was the most productive period of the European School and the Gallery in terms of output, even though they too faced attacks from many sides, first against their theory, and then their practice. The 'turning point' of 1948 shut down all discussion for many years to come, without solving any of the questions that were forcefully suppressed and continued to burn, deep underground.

The inception of the European School in 1946 marked an end to the prewar distance between Hungarian art and Europe, and in this sense, the school carried out real tasks and satisfied real needs over the course of its mission. Among other factors, this was the reason why the new group could effortlessly position itself within the post-1945 artistic vacuum: from the outset, it undertook something entirely *different* from the finally officially-endorsed Szinyei Society (Szinyei [Merse Pál] Társaság) or the Socialist Artists' Group (Szocialista Képzőművészek Csoportja, 1934–1944) that was only very slowly recovering from the losses suffered under Fascist times.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in 1946, the first attacks came primarily from representatives of marginalised tendencies. The most bellicose opponent was János Andrassy Kurta, the leading advocate of a Turanian-inspired, *völkisch*, racially-pure art. While Andrassy appeared to be speaking on behalf of 'manual labourers' when he directed artists' attention towards 'the ubiquitous problems grinding down real people's lives',<sup>6</sup> he was in fact attempting to protect an audience with 'healthy taste' from 'the spirit of impure urban life, far removed from the national character'.<sup>7</sup> His opponent in a debate over whether 'Picasso and the Mona Lisa are boring', Ernő Kállai responded with a biting, satirical caricature of Andrassy and his followers: 'Nothing could be easier than transposing his Fascist "worldview", cobbled together from the remnants of all sorts of worn-out bourgeois traditions, onto the contours of our people's democracy, retouching heroic racial pathos into social compassion for the workers'.<sup>8</sup>

Real, serious attacks against the European School and the Gallery of the Four Directions only really started in 1947. This was also when a type of conceptual frame crystallised in which the term abstraction was deployed as a catchphrase, a 'general equivalent' against any new phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the strongest objection to modern art was its alleged untimeliness. Its detractors could not stomach the fact that 'politically, and in other spheres of social life, the overwhelming majority of formalist or formalism-influenced artists belong to the most progressive stratum of the intelligentsia'.<sup>10</sup> Some critics tried to resolve this contradiction by acknowledging

the pioneering role modern art had played before the Second World War, while also emphasising that it was now, in (purportedly) changed circumstances, out of date. A typical example is Károly László Háy's article 'Art and Progress', in which he formulated the following directive: 'Artists must be made to understand that proud detachment, the guarantor of intellectual freedom and artistic progress under reactionary rule, becomes an obstacle to precisely this progress in a people's democracy because it disconnects the arts from society's upsurging development'.<sup>11</sup> Countless similar statements could be listed here; their essence remains the same. These critics believed that modern art and a progressive worldview were ultimately incompatible, and denied artists the opportunity to prove that the example of Lajos Kassák's Activism could be repeated in post-war Hungarian art, that the coupling of artistic and social revolution was feasible.<sup>12</sup>

Yet being outdated was not the only criticism levelled against the European School and the Gallery. Post-war society palpably sought to deny what had come before, and thus we should not be surprised that its worldview was unambiguously fixated on a happy, illustrious future that would wipe away the past. Paradoxically, this future-orientation was accompanied by the fact that the nascent people's democracy only seemingly attempted to come to terms with history; in fact, it dismissed the indigestible remnants of the disastrous recent past like an unpleasant memory. This hurrah-optimism mixed with denial characterised the theorists of the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) as much as it did the representatives of Gresham Circle.<sup>13</sup> Márton Horváth's 1945 article 'The Workers and Art' prefigured this view. Horváth lambasted one of the exhibitions put on by the party unit of Budapest's District Four, where 'we see nudes that inevitably remind us of the exhumations in Buda ... it came as a real relief to see one or two pictures where one could guess that water is water and wood is wood'.<sup>14</sup> He noted ironically that one of the exhibition's young organisers 'points to a white spot swimming in grey fog in the right-hand corner of a picture: this is hope'.<sup>15</sup> Horváth thus rejected a work he thought evoked the exhumations in the name of an aggressively-sought vision of the future, which regarded the past as conclusively defeated and destroyed, and whose shadows he did not want casting a pall over the one-sided heroic pathos of the new era. This pathos was in many respects understandable, arising as it did from the nascent society's expectations, yet, from the end of the 1940s, it turned into an officially-prescribed idyll. For what Horváth felt as artistic abstraction from reality was in fact reality itself. In the spring of 1945, water indeed did not simply denote itself or eternally rejuvenating nature, but also the Danube bank of the winter of 1944 to 1945 [where Jews were shot, by Fascist militiamen, at the edge of the river so that their bodies fell into the water – *the Editor*]. Similarly, the tree was not merely an enchanting experience either, since the fatigued viewer of the time was justified in linking it to the gallows and the accompanying inferno of executions and butchery. And, naturally, this is also precisely why the small white spot shining out of the fog could, for the young exhibition director, represent a way out of the apocalypse. It was simultaneously universal and a snippet of particular, tangible reality; both abstract reassurance and the concrete promise of freedom. Notably, György Lukács, too, questioned Béla Hamvas and Ernő Kállai for their lack of timely optimism, although the artists of the European School and the Gallery wanted all along to be active participants in the building of the new society and could not have been accused of pessimism.<sup>16</sup> They hoped that 'searching would be a fundamental life-movement', and that this search would be characterised by the trinity of humanism, radicalism, and freedom;<sup>17</sup> that the pictures created would very much reflect 'the era, but not its chaos that corrupts man', as these 'will no longer be enunciations of the seeker but those of the happy man who has already found a heavenly order'.<sup>18</sup> They also summoned, however, the unburied shadows of the past and the irrational depths of the psyche and so represented the belief in 'classlessness and freedom', in 'pure human existence', in a more oblique fashion.<sup>19</sup>

Aversion to the unpleasant, dark sides of reality also typified the spirit of Gresham critics. Lajos Vajda's art faced rejection because of the 'joyless attitude' emanating from his works,<sup>20</sup> whereas 'even the ugliest topics may become beautiful; indeed, they must become beautiful under the painter's brush'.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, Aurél Bernáth's approach was irreconcilable with the views of European School theorists. Bernáth drew on the idea of 'castra' and believed in the taming

and transforming force of art, while European School members preferred evoking mirages rather than actual sights, and in their cosmic-utopian imaginings regarded both idealism and materialism as equally limited.<sup>22</sup> The optimism of Imre Pán, Árpád Mezei, Kállai, and Hamvas was built on the rigour of 'cruel humanism',<sup>23</sup> revealing a notable parallel with the thinking of poets and writers of the Újhold Circle.<sup>24</sup> These literati were willing to take on pessimism and doubt, too, instead of 'the idyllic or benevolent humanism of the elderly or the detractors'.<sup>25</sup> In the words of Ottó Major: 'we go to war (armed with the weapon of pure, murderous truth) ... against malicious alarmism and shallow optimism'.<sup>26</sup> Although their anti-Romanticism and distrust of psychoanalysis distinguished them from the European School theorists, they did share a desire for unsparing self-scrutiny.<sup>27</sup> In the circumstances, however, many critics interpreted this behaviour as the artists and aesthetes turning their backs on the era, as if the strides taken by the nascent people's democracy had not brought about any specific shift in their perspectives. (Even their highest-calibre critic, György Lukács, argued in this fashion.)<sup>28</sup> This increasingly official and dogmatic approach did not solicit a responsible reckoning with the past, nor did it want any inconvenient blemishes spoiling the radiant face of the future: 'It looks as if this tragic youth cannot move beyond the ruins, conserving [them] in their souls and in their art. We can only humbly suggest ... [that they] throw open the windows and their hearts; the sun shines on everyone'.<sup>29</sup> Yet the sun that Anna Oelmacher promised for everyone only shone for those who conformed to the narrow frames of Socialist Realism prescribed by cultural policy. The members of the European School were enveloped in clouds.

It is striking how little the overwhelming majority of attacks against the European School and the Four Quarters touched on aesthetic questions. Only a scant number of texts engaged in actual aesthetic argumentation, notably Aurél Bernáth's study 'The Szinyei Society and The Future of Our Art', which prompted great debate and was heavily disputed in artistic circles.<sup>30</sup> The Szinyei Society, which generally treasured the value of visuality, now arrived at a turning point, reckoned Bernáth in his article: the artists now had to choose between committing themselves to an art 'originating in vision' or following a path of painting that transcended sensualism, one that 'originated in consciousness'. Bernáth felt that Béla Czóbel stood on the dividing line between the two, and hence he regarded the European School as representing endeavours that 'originate in consciousness'. In his (in)famous 1910 text 'The Ways Have Parted', György Lukács argued that 'European art has reached a turning point and the forty years of unbridled demotion of form cannot continue indefinitely'.<sup>31</sup> In the atmosphere of the time, in which aesthetic arguments became arguments of political power, the greatest problem with Aurél Bernáth's art-historical reflections was that they could possibly turn against the author's intentions. Bernáth's article was indeed written in the spirit of parting ways but, writing in 1947, he could not yet have anticipated that his own actions would be used to justify closing down the path leading in one of the two directions. But after all there were certain commonalities among the concepts proposed by Bernáth on the one hand, and Kállai or other European School theorists on the other, that could have served as basis for a thinking collective, even if not a thinking community. After the article's publication, Ernő Kállai expressed just this idea in a letter to Bernáth: 'If you substitute painterly ideals and cognitive ideals with visual perception and visual ideals, as is in any case the point, then the rigid distinction between a figurative and abstract pictorial language promptly vanishes'.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the opportunity for forming a thinking community became impossible during precisely this period, to the great detriment of both groups. István Genton's unbiased and intelligent text 'Generations in the Budapest Art Scene', gave voice to this very impression in that he solicited more tolerance from representatives of the Gresham Circle, whom he regarded as excessively small-minded:

It is impossible to ignore that young artists are organising themselves independently from their more established colleagues ... I can confirm that some groups enjoy large and enthusiastic audiences. The fact that Picasso's formidable, magic gaze at times blazes through in their pictures, and especially their graphics, is not necessarily the proof of a lack of independence, but rather indicates that they know who to learn from.<sup>33</sup>

Among the attacks launched 'from various positions, with various justifications, in the name of aesthetics or the principles and doctrines of the natural sciences, ideology or politics', <sup>34</sup> by far the most significant was György Lukács's study 'Hungarian Theories of Abstract Art'. <sup>35</sup> This article is a prime example of the direct politicisation and instrumentalisation of aesthetic thought, practiced on however high a level. Lukács's prejudiced analyses of books by Béla Hamvas, Katalin Kemény, and Ernő Kállai were shockingly insensitive both towards the writings themselves and the theories they engaged with. <sup>36</sup> He regarded abstract art as a malformed, one-sided, and therefore defunct and reactionary response to Fascism, and he inevitably approached treatises written on the subject from the same perspective. Departing from this ideological starting point, Lukács regarded Béla Hamvas, Katalin Kemény, and Ernő Kállai as advocates of sorts for petty bourgeois and decadent art, thus *a priori* rejected their aesthetic considerations as ahistorical.

For Lukács, the historical-philosophical applicability of these works and theories was minimal; there was no way they could serve, even in partisan fashion, what he regarded as a correct approach to art. Reflecting the tragicomedy of the situation, these works indeed contained nothing of what Lukács demanded of them (and what he himself considered as the only relevant aspect), while they contained everything else that Lukács could not, as a slave to his own vantage point, possibly appreciate in them.

If, in the given social environment, Aurél Bernáth's article may have had an impact so contrary to the author's original intentions, this was even more so the case with Lukács's study. As it transpires from the recollections of his contemporaries, Lukács's article was interpreted as a declaration of cultural policy; its readers felt that a new era was coming in which their existence would be discredited, and not just in an aesthetic sense. Lukács's article was followed by the publication of Márton Horváth's study 'Taking Stock of the Literary Life in Democratic Hungary', which banished all illusions regarding the fate of progressive Hungarian art. <sup>37</sup>

Amidst diminishing opportunities and increasingly-aggressive press attacks, the last sources of refuge for the European School were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the journal *Kortárs* (*Contemporary*), edited under the SDP's auspices by Lajos Kassák and Pál Justus. Space was provided here for writers who were otherwise slowly being silenced: studies by Ernő Kállai, <sup>38</sup> Imre Pán's refined writings, essays and poems by Pál Kiss, <sup>39</sup> and Pál Justus's brave, determined text 'Art, Worldview, Reality', <sup>40</sup> which surely provoked displeasure from Márton Horváth, providing him with an excellent opportunity to pass judgement on the 'Weimaresque phantoms' of 'isms'. <sup>41</sup>

Viewed from today, Pál Justus's bravery was nothing more than an otherwise healthy amount of patience and openness towards new developments in art. He knew that 'reality ... is more than and different from surface reality: dreams, entrancement, surging instincts, the movements of form-destroying forces are equivalent to reality. Particularly in the era of changes...' <sup>42</sup>

Máriusz Rabinovszky's journalism was characterised by moderation and the spirit of mediation, a demeanour so tragically absent in the public life shredded by conflicts and insults. <sup>43</sup> Rabinovszky himself belonged to neither tendency, while neither did he enjoy the luxury of observing events from the outside. He did believe that abstract art should be accorded a place in the new society, and thus sharply denounced the ubiquitous criticism of the era, according to which:

these extreme tendencies represent the forgivable but nevertheless morbid flight from reality on the part of a disintegrating bourgeois society. Since today we are building a new society and a reality worthy of life, the retreat of art is now obsolete, reactionary behaviour, even if it was legitimate in the recent past. Every honest democrat can now exhale: he is exonerated from heaving to deal further with these phenomena of modern society that smell of rotting corpses. <sup>44</sup>

Concurring with Ernő Kállai, Rabinovszky submitted that there was no forced, compulsory, either-or choice between imitative and abstract, but rather that both were viable artistic methods, burdened by values and questions alike. Although Rabinovszky might have disputed certain

statements of the European School theorists,<sup>45</sup> he nonetheless viewed abstract art itself as one of the possible forms of expression in the new society.<sup>46</sup> In February 1948, the very same Máriusz Rabinovszky still believed that ‘it may in the end transpire that abstract art is not so anti-social, and not the private affair of a rotting social stratum’, yet, a few months later, under the impact of accelerated change, he was pressed to modify his opinion: ‘From the point of view of the entire society, the current value of abstract art is almost nothing, or in terms of propaganda directed at the masses, it may have a decidedly harmful impact’.<sup>47</sup>

The above overview of the contemporary press makes it amply clear today that the struggle of the European School and the Gallery of the Four Directions was already hopeless in 1946 to 1947, since every opportunity created by the nascent democracy during these years already represented, for the Stalinists in the Hungarian Communist Party, merely facets of the complete seizure of power. Ernő Kállai, Imre Pán, Árpád Mezei, and the painters thought in aesthetic categories, but they were facing an exclusively-political reality, tougher and even more merciless than they had imagined.

### **Broken Dolls: Central-European Parallels and Connections**

‘We have always understood the ideal “European” to mean “Western European”. From now on, we must think of “Entire-Europe”. A new Europe can only be built on the synthesis of West and East’.<sup>48</sup> This statement, part of the European School’s programme, not only represented a demand for the formation of a Hungarian art based upon a certain synthesis, but also a half-utopian, half-realistic possibility: the creation of an organic Central-European art. The task was to piece together the tattered internationalism of the 1920s avant-garde in a fundamentally-transformed environment, drawing on a sort of cruel humanism, sceptical optimism, and the ‘dialectics of dialectics’.<sup>49</sup> Admittedly, the differences between like-minded Central-European artistic movements were now greater than in the first decades of the century, the strands connecting them were flimsier and more ephemeral, and collaboration did not go smoothly, often consisting of nothing more than taking up contact. Because of the narrow timeframe available (between 1945 and 1948), and the ever-more-ubiquitous, dogmatic cultural policy offensive in Central Europe, the bulk of artists’ plans frequently remained just that. Nevertheless, an intense, unique, and variegated art emerged distinctly from the local milieu in the second half of the 1940s.

The founding experience of this art was the First World War. Accordingly, its most important elements came from Surrealism, coloured with pathos-free, no-nonsense neo-Realism, growing expressive currents, and the non-figurative tendencies that emerged in parallel. Naturally, the proportion of these components varied in each country and movement, but beyond the stylistic differences, one can nevertheless discern intellectual and aesthetic specifics which ultimately made them parts of a shared, coherent movement.

For example, Czech artists, whose ambitions resembled those of the European School, spoke the language of Surrealism much more naturally, almost as a mother tongue. Surrealism had significant traditions in Prague: for artists emerging in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Karel Teige, Vítězslav Nezval, Jindřich Štyrský, Jindřich Heisler, Toyen and other Czech Surrealist figures represented tradition and guarantees of continuity. The strength of the Czech movement was signalled in the decision of the ‘younger Surrealists’ at the 1937 Prague exhibition *D 37* to depart from orthodox Surrealism.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand, they moved towards a coldly objective, ‘Realist Surrealist’ art of ‘civilisation’ (the 1942 Group (Skupina 1942)), and on the other, towards a more political, ‘combative Surrealism’, one that declared the inadequacy of humanism alone.<sup>51</sup> The latter faction, which included artists who would later join the Ra Group (Skupina Ra) (the poets and aesthetes Ludvík Kundera and Zdeněk Lorenc, the painters Bohdan Lacina, Josef Istler, Vilém Reichmann, and Václav Tikal, and the photographers Miloš Koreček and Václav Zykmund), published an entire series of illegally-mimeographed collections during the German occupation. These anthology-like collections wanted to ‘oppose the horrors of the age of monstrosity, when the focal point of psychic cognition becomes impossible’ since it had ‘encountered the permanent

spark of the light of dread'.<sup>52</sup> In the early 1940s, Czechoslovak artists too struggled with demons that had emerged from the depths of the underworld. Josef Istler's *Figure* (*Figura*, 1945), Václav Tikal's *Apocalyptic Landing* (*Přistání v Apokalypsii*, 1944), *Last Human Thing* (*Poslední věci člověka*, 1941), and *Fear* (1944), Václav Zykumund's *Spiderwebs* (*Pavučiny*, 1944) or, from a member of the previous generation, Toyen's *Marsh* (*Bažina*, 1941), evoke Lajos Vajda's monsters and gnomes, Béla Bán's ancient women frozen in spasm, and Imre Ámos's painful visions.<sup>53</sup> Stylistic analogies did not exist to such an extent between Czech 'young Surrealism' and Hungarian 'pre-Surrealism', although Václav Zykumund's etched expressive surfaces are reminiscent of Dezső Korniss's dramatic compositions from the early 1940s, and Josef Istler's monotypes and abstract Indian ink drawings may be compared to Dezső Korniss's *Illumination* (*Illumináció*) or Tamás Lossonczy's graphics (Fig. 26.1). The occasional analogous traits rather derive from the analogous circumstances in which the artists found themselves, and from their similar reckoning with reality. Just as a 'new Romanticism' emerged in Hungary from expressive-dramatic elements mixed with Surrealist inspiration during an era of 'broken dolls',<sup>54</sup> so would the illegal album edited by Josef Istler and Zdenek Lorenc bear the title 'Romanticism of the Twentieth Century'.<sup>55</sup> After 1945, the central task of both cohorts would be to compel the indelible trauma caused by the Second World War into artworks, as evinced by the Ra Group's 1946 publication *And Meanwhile The War* (*A zátím co válka*).<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 26.1.  
Dezső Korniss,  
*Cricket Wedding*  
(*Tücsöklakodalm*,  
1948). Oil  
on canvas,  
122 x 300 cm.  
Ferenczy Museum  
Center, Szentendre.  
© DACS 2019.

Thus, when the Ra Group and the European School met via the French aesthete Claude Serbanne (his mediation being a bitter grimace of Central-European art's isolation), we can rightly speak of a true meeting of minds.<sup>57</sup> This remains the case even if Ra's consequent Surrealism diverged from the European School's conscious incorporation of various stylistic tendencies, and even if we can discern differences in their interpretation of Surrealism itself between the Czech writers and aesthetes (Ludvík Kundera and Zdenek Lorenc) and Árpád Mezei and Imre Pán. Paradoxically, the European School, and Árpád Mezei in particular, were more closely connected to 'classical Surrealism' via their stronger connections to André Breton and Marcel Jean than the Czech group, which was partly raised on the Surrealist school. Ludvík Kundera and colleagues sought the path of renewal for their movement in other directions. Rejecting what they viewed as an excessively mechanistic adaptation of psychoanalysis, they returned to the 'heroic' Surrealist period of 1927 to 1933 and connected the artistic revolution firmly to social revolution, endorsing dialectics as the central pillar of their thinking. Consequently, they did not take part in the Surrealists' 1947 world exhibition in Paris (*Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght), but instead enthusiastically joined the international movement of 'Revolutionary Surrealists', which broke with Breton to embrace both Surrealism and Socialism. At the 1948 International Conference of Revolutionary Surrealists in Brussels, Czechoslovakia was represented by Josef Istler and the poet Zdenek Lorenc, who became an editorial board member of the movement's short-lived journal, *Le surréalisme révolutionnaire* (*Revolutionary Surrealism*).<sup>58</sup> The interesting episode from early 1948,



when the European School almost joined the Revolutionary Surrealists, is worth mentioning here. Tibor Tardos, the Hungarian correspondent, acted as an intermediary between the Revolutionary Surrealist leader Dotreméon and Árpád Mezei. The attempt ultimately failed.<sup>59</sup> The Second Revolutionary Surrealist Congress, planned for 1949 in Prague, did not take place as the group had disintegrated by then. Nevertheless, the two years of the movement's existence exerted a significant influence over the Ra Group. These artists thus came into contact with members of the later Cobra group, including Asger Jorn, whose pre-Art-Informel expressive abstraction was related on a number of points to the Ra Group's non-figurative Surrealism, Josef Istler's torn structures, and Václav Zykmund's writhing streaks of colour. No European School members had yet embarked on the path of Abstract Expressionism at this time, although the sensory Elementarism seen in contemporary works by Karel Appel, Henry Heerup and Pedersen was already palpable in Béla Bán's graphics and Margit Anna's Primitivism (Fig. 26.2).<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 26.2. Margit Anna, *Girl with a Red Bow* (*Piros masnis leány*, 1948). Cardboard, oil. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. © Szépművészeti Múzeum / Museum of Fine Arts, 2019. © DACS 2019



Fig. 26.3. Tamás Lossonczy, *Grief and Hope (Fájdalom és remény, 1945)*. Oil on canvas, 78 x 200 cm. Janus Pannonius Múzeum, Pécs, inv. no.: KM.97.1. Image courtesy Janus Pannonius Múzeum. © DACS 2019

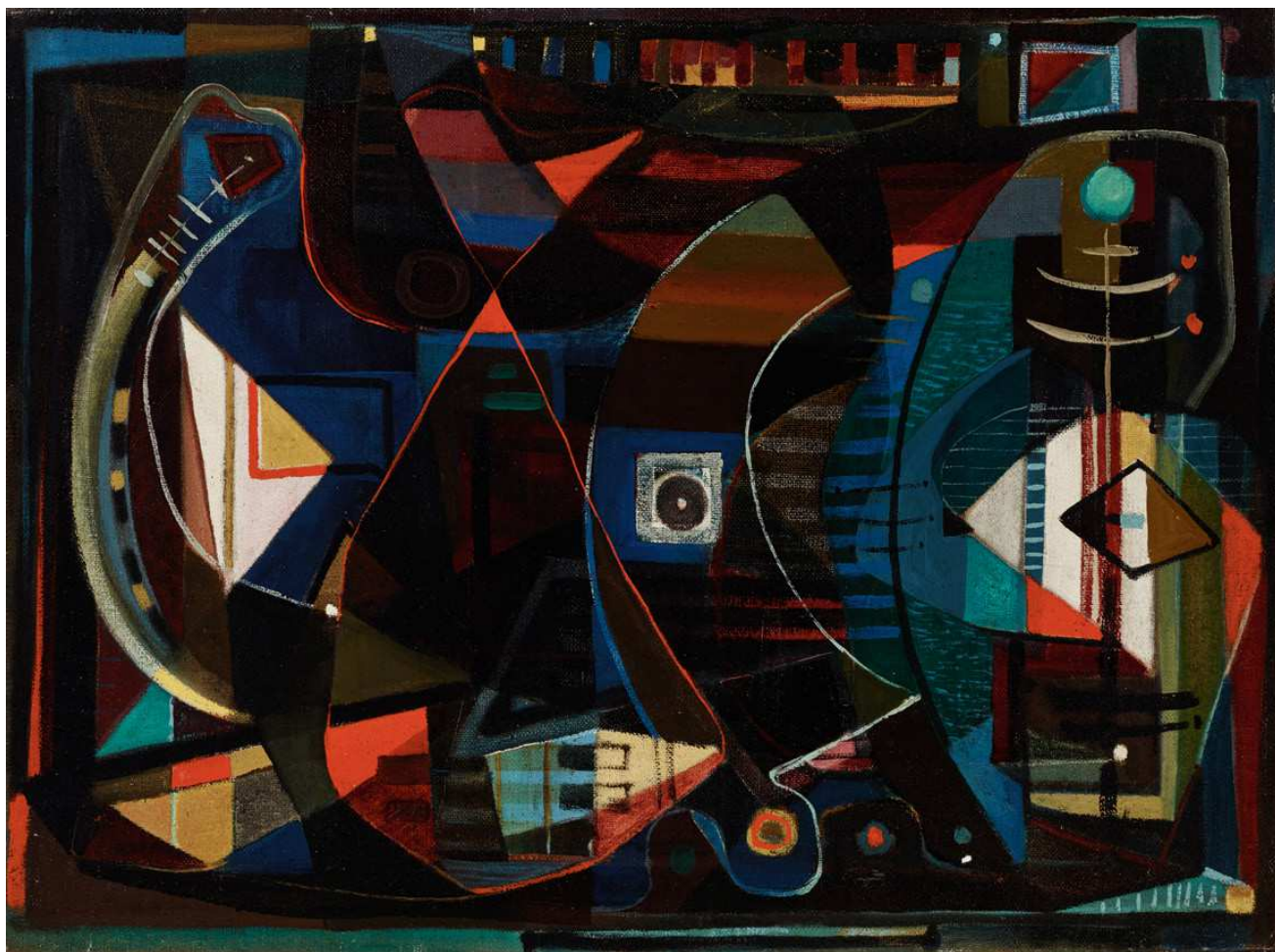
The close connections that existed between the platforms of the various groups at the time are further demonstrated by an increased interest across the board in folk art, or rather its more archaic strands. Hungary was not alone in holding exhibitions devoted to folkloric practices, or publishing articles on the peasantry's role as a vehicle of culture: all this also occupied the Czech Surrealists. Vladimír Bouček wrote a study on the atavism preserved in Czech, Moravian, and Slovak peasant culture and the automatism that may surge from it. To complete the circle, his article was published in the *Cobra* periodical.<sup>61</sup> André Tamm's study on the connection between folk art and modern art was also published around the same time, and there was a group whose fundamental source of inspiration was instinctual, raw nature and primal, collective art.<sup>62</sup> Their primary point of departure was folk art and the art of archaic cultures: this group was the Cobra.<sup>63</sup>

These changes that came to fruition from the early 1940s added further colour to the art of the Ra Group. The early days were frequently characterised by a hallucinatory Verism (Istler, Reichmann, Tikal), one that drew continually from the horrors experienced at close hand, and whose dramatic, heroic symbols distinguished it from the archetype, Salvador Dalí's method built on paranoia. Over time, this Verism became more closely connected to the non-figurative and predominantly its oneiric-associative variant. In one of his letters, Ludvík Kundera rightly speaks of 'secondary post-Surrealism', a technical description not to be limited to Czech wartime art only, since the connection between a visionary non-figuration and Surrealism had become common across Europe.<sup>64</sup> The activities of the Hungarian group The Gallery of the Four Directions (in particular Tamás Lossonczy and Tihamér Gyarmathy) gravitated in this direction (Figs. 26.3 and 26.4). Of course, in every country, this connection bore local particularities according to local traditions and circumstances: in Czechoslovakia, montage featured as a predominant method of picture creation, while Hungarian artists tended to preserve their predecessors' pantheist concerns. This is one of the reasons why propositions about a 'hidden face of nature' enjoyed greater resonance. But works by the Ra Group also revealed some distant parallels with this approach: photographs and 'folk' works by Reichmann, and Koreček in particular, similarly surmise the possibility of a preoccupation with the eternal variety of nature.<sup>65</sup>

This is why, when the Ra artists made their debut in Hungary in the second half of 1947, their audience not only appreciated the friendly gesture of making contact but could also witness the realisation of an artistic platform that resembled the European School in many ways. The exhibition also demonstrated that the European School was not alone, and that in the wake of similar experiments, a new art could come into being in Central Europe, one that could transcend national borders.

Yet the realisation of such an art was hindered by history. The Czech Surrealists' debut in Budapest could not be reciprocated in Prague or Brno: from the end of 1947 onwards, Zhdanovite dogmatism asserted itself increasingly strongly in Hungary's northern neighbours, too. Intolerant cultural policy did not spare Czech Surrealism either: Štyrsky and Toyen had been forced into





permanent exile and settled in Paris. The year 1949 saw the cessation of *Blok*, a modern art journal comparable in terms of both character and high quality to the Hungarian *Alkotás* (*Creation*), while Ra group members were increasingly excluded from their country's artistic life. Sadly, Karel Teige's suicide to escape police persecution brought one of the greatest eras of Czech art to a close, both metaphorically and literally.

The European School made contact with the Romanian Surrealists once again through the intermediary of Claude Serbanne.<sup>66</sup> Much like in the case of the Czech movement, Bucharest already saw a second Surrealist generation playing a decisive role. The diverse activities of this 'second group' between 1944 and 1977 are perhaps only comparable to those of the European School: even their publishers' names were Surrealist-inspired, with Oblivion Press (Edition l'Oublie) and Infra-Black Press (Edition Infra-Noir) regularly publishing texts, poems, and studies by Dolfi Trost and Gherasim Luca, the two leading figures, and by Paul Păun, Gellu Naum, and Virgil Teodorescu.<sup>67</sup>

Naturally, this enthusiastic flurry of creative and organising activity (exhibitions, book series, and publications), attesting to the abundant energies of Romanian Surrealism, was based on avant-garde traditions stretching back to the 1920s. Just as in Czechoslovakia, Surrealism was also at home in Bucharest representing, from the 1930s onwards, the continuity of the Romanian avant-garde, even if only at a subcultural level. The journal *unu* (*one*), edited by the 'Romanian Breton' Saşa Pană from 1928 to 1932, was first published as early as 1928, the same year as the debut of *Urmuz: vitrină de artă nouă* (*Urmuz: new show-window for art*), to which Tristan Tzara and Victor Brauner both contributed. This was followed in 1930 by the relaunch of the pronouncedly Surrealist-derived *Alge*, edited by Aureliu Baranga, which lasted for five issues.<sup>68</sup> The *unu* publication series outlived the journal itself, lasting until the early 1940s. The series included Surrealist works by Ilarie Voronca and Geo Bogza, and non-Romanians, including

Fig. 26.4. Tihamér Gyarmathy, *Lights and Shadows* (*Fények és árnyékok*, 1947). Oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm. Janus Pannonius Múzeum, Pécs. Image courtesy Janus Pannonius Múzeum. © DACS 2019

Paul Éluard, with illustrations by prominent artists such as Victor Brauner, Max Hermann Maxy, Jules Perahim, Marcel Janco, and Man Ray.<sup>69</sup> It was within this milieu, so radically different from conservative artistic life in 1930s Hungary, that the two defining figures of post-war Romanian Surrealism reached maturity: Gherasim Luca and Dolfi Trost.

Like other Romanian Surrealists, they too directly drew on the French movement. As flesh-and-blood Surrealists, their works displayed almost all the characteristics of the movement: playfulness, a dreamlike quality, an inexhaustible curiosity towards the unknown and a desire to discover, dark humour, attraction to sexuality, and the inclination, an inheritance from Dada, to shock.<sup>70</sup> Their works wove together fine arts and literature, with brutal and exotic dreams coming to life in oneiric prose poems, and the automatic cascade of their language use occasionally reminiscent of Lettrism.<sup>71</sup> Their fine-art works relied on the reign of the accidental and instinctual as well. The starting point of their method, which they called 'surautomatism', was the 'objective accidental'.<sup>72</sup> Trost painted, or rather splattered pictures with his eyes closed or blindfolded (this came to be called 'vaporisation'), while Luca's 'cubomanias' incorporated unforeseeable, unrationalisable momentum into a Max Ernst-style collage technique.<sup>73</sup> Their works combined a boundless desire for freedom, a permanent, unceasing revolution of the imagination, in which values and phenomena held to be stable and enduring were inverted and turned inside out; in their words: 'the negation of the negation of a negation'.<sup>74</sup> This was why they were simultaneously attracted to Karl Marx and black magic, to Vladimir Lenin and the world of bizarre phenomena. Their works concealed a general loss of values caused by uncertainty and the shock inflicted by the Second World War. They regarded themselves as the 'great shipwrecked', while their heroic experiment aspired to sweep away the last remaining, by now entirely meaningless, taboos that endured in a world without secure moorings.<sup>75</sup> The statement Árpád Mezei made in relation to the Ra Group perhaps even better describes the Romanians: 'Surrealism has come to the point of doing away with the differentiation between beautiful and ugly, true and false, good and bad, and thus making this world finally inhabitable'.<sup>76</sup> Trost, Luca, and their associates returned to the great Surrealist experiment of the late 1920s, the merger of social and artistic revolution, flying the flag for both Marx and Breton, and announcing the concept of permanent revolution in the summary of their ideas, *Dialectic of the Dialectic* (*Dialectique de la dialectique*).<sup>77</sup> Correspondingly, their position drew closer to that of the Revolutionary Surrealists, yet the Romanians never split with Breton. As participants at the 1947 Paris exhibition, they announced their anti-Oedipal revolution, 'the sexual liberation of the proletariat', in their manifesto published as part of the exhibition catalogue.<sup>78</sup>

Having made contact with the European School, Luca insisted on behalf of the Bucharest group that as well as maintaining personal contacts and exchanging publications, the Hungarians also should actively join the international Surrealist movement.<sup>79</sup> To that effect, the first reciprocal exhibitions were planned for 1948, in the rapidly-changing political situation, however, time ultimately ran out. In the meantime, conflicts grew between Trost and Luca and other members of the group (Teodorescu and Naum) who gradually turned away from Surrealism towards Socialist Realism.<sup>80</sup> These clashes caused the movement to finally split and for Trost and Luca to emigrate. En route to Paris, they visited Árpád Mezei in Budapest, but this meeting marked the end of their relationship.<sup>81</sup>

Although these factors account for significant differences between the European School and the art of the Romanian group, with its attraction to the absurd and a 'Surrealist Mannerism', we nevertheless encounter numerous notions in works produced by the Bucharest group that were 'in the air in Central-Eastern Europe' at the time, equally occupying artists in Budapest, Brno, Warsaw and other artistic centres of the region.<sup>82</sup> In line with this, the Romanians' writings addressed problems which also became of fundamental importance for the European School, such as the relativity of values, the 'poeticisation' of the natural sciences, and a possible synthesis of scientific findings and art. 'On both objective and subjective grounds we accept those discoveries ... which exert such a compelling influence over us, such as non-Euclidean geometry, the fourth dimension, Brownian motion, the space-time quantum and, at the same time, we are in favour

of non-Pasteurian biology...'.<sup>83</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, these ideas are in agreement with Ernő Kállai's concepts and Hamvas's perception of the sciences.<sup>84</sup> Despite the discrepancies, there did exist points of connection, on the basis of which the various groups, departing from different starting points and operating under different circumstances, could have cooperated, whether through argument or agreement, in a creative fashion.

A synthesis promising exciting results was thus underway but could not eventually come about. Our assumption is that in more auspicious circumstances, and with the participation of Austrian and Polish groups with similar aims, a specifically Central-European post-Surrealist art could have come into existence, one that in many senses would have recalled avant-garde co-operations of the 1920s.<sup>85</sup> These movements, among them the European School, had already embarked along the path of Revolutionary Surrealism flanking Abstract Expressionism, but they could not fulfil their promises: the 'broken dolls' of the Second World War were not reunited through art.<sup>86</sup>

*Translated by Gwen Jones*

1 Manifesto of the European School, reprinted as blurb on the inner cover of the booklet series 'Library of the European School' ('Európai Iskola Könyvtára') and 'Index Library for Pamphlets' ('Index Röpirat és Vitairat-Könyvtár') (Budapest: Művészbolt, 1946–).

2 János Andrassy Kurta, 'Absztrakt művészet a népi demokráciában?', *Szabad Szó* (1 June 1946). Reprinted in Zoltán Nagy (ed.), *Kritikák és képek. Válogatás a magyar képzőművészet dokumentumaiból, 1945–1975* (Budapest: Corvina, 1976), pp. 43–44.

3 For example: '(a)' [*sic*], 'Európai Iskola', *Világ* (17 March 1947); 'sz. s.' [Sándor Szerdahelyi], 'Kiállítás', *Világosság* (March 1946); 'd. m.' [Mária Dutka], 'Európai Iskola: új művészcsoporthoz első kiállítása', *Független Magyarország* (11 March 1946); Márta Jacobi, 'Az Európai Iskola kiállítása', *Független Magyarország* (25 November 1946); 'K. G.', 'Az Európai Iskola csoportkiállítása', *Szabadság* (22 November 1946); 'H.', 'Az Európai Iskola kiállításához', *Szabad Nép* (28 November 1946).

4 Ernő Kállai, 'Szelíd válasz egy csipős kritikára', *Köztársaság* (27 June 1946). Besides János Andrassy Kurta's article mentioned in note 2, see also: 'O. A.' [Anna Oelmacher], 'Az "Európai" Iskola kiállítása', *A Tett* 4 (18 March 1946); Lajos Hollós Korvin, 'Európai Iskola', *Köztársaság* (25 June 1946).

5 Szinyei Society (Szinyei Merse Pál Társaság), 1920–1949, had a pivotal role in the art scene of interwar Hungary. It represented a sort of modernism that was more conservative than the avant-garde 'isms', but served as a bourgeois liberal counterpoint to the official art of the far-right regime in the 1930s and early 1940s. (*The Editor*)

6 János Andrassy Kurta, *Korszerű művészet és népiség* (Budapest: Magyar Népi Művelődési Intézet, 1947), p. 16.

7 Kurta, *Korszerű művészet és népiség*, p. 17.

8 Ernő Kállai, 'Vigyázat, Műcsarnok!', *Szabad Szó* (23 June 1946). Reprinted in Nagy (ed.), *Kritikák és képek*, pp. 45–47.

9 In the simplifying terminology of the time, anything beyond naturalistic reproduction (Fauvism, Expressionism, Surrealism) was qualified as 'abstract'. This phrase was used so pervasively in the press between 1945 and 1948 that it should not be surprising that even Máriusz Rabinovszky used it in this sense. Máriusz Rabinovszky, 'Európai Iskola', *Magyarok* 6 (1946): pp. 333–35.

10 See: Kurta, 'A képzőművészet időszerű kérdéséről', *Új Szó* (23 September 1946). Reprinted in Nagy (ed.), *Kritikák és képek*, pp. 36–38.

11 Károly László Háy, 'Művészet és haladás', *Szabad Művészet* 142 (1947): p. 4.

12 Activism, initiated by Lajos Kassák, was an avant-garde movement in Hungary. Its supporters clustered around Kassák's journals *MA (Today)* and *A TETT (The Act)*, and shared radical views on society and the arts. The Activists took part in reforming art during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (Republic of Councils) in 1919.

13 The theorists of the Communist Party were Márton Horváth, József Révai, and, first and foremost, György Lukács and György

Vértess. From the younger generation we might mention György Somlyó and Imre Keszi. Gresham theorists included Aurél Bernáth, Pál Pátzay, Jenő Kopp, Béla Újvári, and even Pál Szegi and Milán Füst.

14 Márton Horváth, 'Munkásság és művészet', *Szabad Nép* (4 May 1945): p. 9.

15 Horváth, 'Munkásság és művészet', p. 9.

16 György Lukács, 'Az absztrakt művészet magyar elméletei', *Fórum* 9 (1947): pp. 115–27.

17 Lajos Szabó, 'Irodalom és rémület', response to Imre Keszi, *Diárium* 1 (1946): p. 36.

18 Ernő Kállai, 'Lossonczy Tamásról', manuscript, MDK-C-11/523.

19 Ernő Kállai, 'Ember a művészetben', *Kortárs* 10 (October 1947). Reprinted in Éva Forgács (ed.), *Művészet veszélyes csillagzat alatt. Válogatott cikkek, tanulmányok* (Budapest: Corvina, 1981), p. 357.

20 Béla Újvári, 'Az Európai Iskola XXVI. kiállítása, Vajda Lajos', *Magyar Művészet* 1 (1948): p. 22.

21 Aurél Bernáth, 'Jegyzetek a művészetről (Elbeszélni, de festő módján)', *Magyar Művészet* 3 (1948): p. 132.

22 'Castrum' (lat. 'fortress') was Bernáth's own term to describe dense visions—extraordinary or trivial visual memories—that are stored in the subconscious, but may occasionally burst into the surface with compelling force. (*The Editor*). See: Aurél Bernáth, *Így éltünk Pannóniában* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1956), p. 129.

23 Ottó Major, 'Kegyetlen humanizmus', *Újhold* 1 (January 1948): p. 5.

24 This circle included Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Iván Mándy, János Pilinszky, Ottó Major, and Balázs Lengyel. (*The Editor*).

25 Major, 'Kegyetlen humanizmus', p. 5.

26 Major, 'Kegyetlen humanizmus', p. 5.

27 See: Sándor Tóth, 'Eidolosz, a kettősképlet', *Újhold* 2 (June 1947): p. 66; Ottó Major, 'Kulisszák között', *Kortárs* 10 (October 1947): p. 45. 'This is why I find every manifestation of romanticism outrageous: the pleasant moss and the fragrant weeds, for which I am willing to forget about the wreckage; the diverting operetta, the pulsating tam-tam of jazz which warns of death in its vulgarity, and my own fallibility too, with which I am not infrequently taken in by these easy beauties ... if I get a bunch of flowers, that's what I think of: I have a bomb in my hands'. As explicated in Major's essay, *Újhold's* anti-Romanticism pertained to a form of extraneous Romanticism, and not Kállai's concept of the eternal romantic.

28 Lukács, 'Az absztrakt művészet magyar elméletei'.

29 Anna Oelmacher, 'Tragikus ifjúság (A Fővárosi Képtár kiállításáról)', *Nagyvilág*, 15 (January 1947).

30 Aurél Bernáth, 'A Szinyei Társaság és művészetünk útja', *Válasz* 3 (1947): pp. 255–63.

- 31 György Lukács, 'Az utak elváltak', *Nyugat* 1 (1 February 1910): pp. 190–93. Reprinted in György Lukács, *Ifjúkori művek* (Budapest: Magvető, 1977), pp. 280–87.
- 32 Ernő Kállai, letter to Aurél Bernáth (9 April 1947). MTA MKCS, MDK-C-I-111/131, p. 1.
- 33 István Genthon, 'Nemzedékek a budapesti művészetben', *Budapest* 10 (1946): pp. 365–66.
- 34 Ernő Kállai, *Zajlás az absztrakt művészet körül*, manuscript, MTA MKCS tul. MDK-C-I-11/511, 2. l.
- 35 Kállai, 'Lossonczy Tamásról'.
- 36 Béla Hamvas and Katalin Kemény, *Forradalom a művészetben. Absztrakció és szürrealizmus Magyarországon* (Budapest: Misztótfalusi Kiadó, undated [1947]); Ernő Kállai, *A természet rejtett arca* (Budapest: Misztótfalusi Kiadó, 1947).
- 37 Márton Horváth, 'A magyar demokrácia irodalmi életének mérlege', *Csillag* 4 (March 1948).
- 38 Ernő Kállai, 'Ember a művészetben', *Kortárs* 10 (1947): p. 10; and 'Művészet és tömeg', *Kortárs* 11 (1947): pp. 100–102.
- 39 Pál Kiss, 'A művészet "lélektana"', *Alkotás* 1 (1947).
- 40 Pál Justus, 'Művészet – Valóság – világnézet', *Kortárs* 2 (1947): pp. 38–39.
- 41 Horváth, 'A magyar demokrácia irodalmi életének mérlege'.
- 42 Justus, 'Művészet – Valóság – világnézet', p. 39.
- 43 On Rabinovszky's work and character, see also Kinga Bódi's essay in this Reader. (*The Editor*).
- 44 Máriusz Rabinovszky, 'Az absztrakt művészet körül', *Magyarok* 4 (1947): p. 317.
- 45 For Pál Kiss, for example, 'art is not a substitute religion, but religion itself... If Freud rationalised the irrational, such theories reduce Freud's reason back again to irrationalism'. 'Európai Iskola', *Magyarok* 6 (1946): p. 334.
- 46 Máriusz Rabinovszky, 'Levél Martyn Ferenchez az absztrakt festészetről', *Sorsunk* 2 (1948): pp. 98–102.
- 47 Máriusz Rabinovszky, 'Harc az absztrakt művészet körül', *Politika* (22 May 1948). Reprinted in Rabinovszky, *Két korszak határán. Válogatott művészeti írásk* (Budapest: Corvina, 1965).
- 48 The manifesto of the European School: see note 1.
- 49 Ghérasim Luca and Dolfi Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique. Message adressé au mouvement surréaliste international* (Bucharest: Surréalisme, 1945).
- 50 Ludvík Kundera, 'Mladší surrealisté', *Blok* 2–3/1 (1946): p. 77.
- 51 The most important members of the 1942 Group (Skupina 1942) were: the painters Fr. Gross and Fr. Hudeček, K. Souček, the photographers M. Háek and L. Zivř. See: J. Vykoukal, 'Skupina Ra', *Umění* 5 (1972): pp. 453–469, especially p. 463.
- 52 J. Řežáč, *Grafické listy Otty Mizery*, exhibition catalogue, Grafický kabinet (Prague, 1946). Cited in Vykoukal, 'Skupina Ra', pp. 453–454.
- 53 Josef Istler, *Figure* (oil on canvas, 130 x 94 cm. Collection J. Puchmertl); Václav Tikal, *Apocalyptic Landing* (oil on canvas, 61 x 47 cm. Krajská Galerie, Hrádec Kralovce); Tikal, *Last Human Thing* (oil on canvas, 72 x 99.5 cm. National Gallery, Prague. no. 0.10.438); Tikal, *Fear* (oil on canvas, 43x38 cm. National Gallery, Prague. no. 0.11.052); Václav Zykumund, *Spiderwebs* (oil on veneer, 55 x 80 cm. National Gallery, Prague. no. 0.9642); Toyen, *Marsh* (oil on canvas, 53 x 44 cm. National Gallery, Prague. no. 0.11.561).
- 54 With reference to the title of the illegally-distributed collection *Broken Dolls (Roztrhané panenky)*, 1942).
- 55 Josef Istler and Zdenek Lorenc, *Romantismus 20. století*, 1943 (illegal self-publication in 30 exemplars).
- 56 Václav Zykumund (ed.), *A zatím co valka* (Brno: Edice Ra, 1946) (with works by J. Istler, M. Koreček, L. Kundera, B. Lacina, Z. Lorenc, O. Mizera, J. Puchmertl, V. Reichmann, V. Tikal, and V. Zykumund).
- 57 Ludvík Kundera, letter to Árpád Mezei (14 April 1947) (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest).
- 58 *Le Surréalisme révolutionnaire* 1, (March–April 1948).
- 59 Christian Dotremont, telegram to Árpád Mezei (11 October 1947), (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest): 'I ask the European School and personally you to send a quick report about the intellectual and aesthetic situation of Hungary'. See also: Tibor Tardos, letter to Árpád Mezei and Imre Pán (undated, c. second half of 1947), (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest): 'Dotremont wrote me about Mezei; he has received his letter. In Paris, they are organising a surr-rév [Revolutionary Surrealist] world congress and he asked me whom to invite from Budapest. What would you [Mezei] say to attending?'
- 60 On the Cobra group's connection to Surrealism, see: Édouard Jaguer, 'Le moment Cobra et le surréalisme', *Bulletin de liaison* 15 (1982): pp. 3–15; Agnès Angliviel de la Beaumelle, 'Cobra', in *Paris-Paris 1937–1957*, exhibition catalogue, CNAC Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1981), pp. 1946–1956.
- 61 Vladimír Bouček, 'L'art populaire et l'époque actuelle', *Cobra* 1 (1948): p. 14.
- 62 André Tamm, 'Die deutsche Volkskunst und ihr Verhältnis zur experimentellen Kunst', in Laszlo Glozer (ed.), *Westkunst, Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1938* (Köln: DuMont, 1981), pp. 168–69.
- 63 Jaguer, 'Le moment Cobra et le surréalisme', pp. 4, 148.
- 64 'We are at the start of a new development, and this is secondary post-Surrealism. It is possible that all this is epigonism and of poor quality, but it is also possible that it will be the high-point of Surrealism – or maybe it is no longer Surrealism but something different, it's difficult to say'. Ludvík Kundera, letter to Árpád Mezei (25 May 1947) (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest).
- 65 The Surrealist photogram, aptly named 'fokalk', refers to Domínguez's method used in Surrealist painting, 'decalcomania'.
- 66 Ghérasim Luca, letter to Árpád Mezei (12 February 1947) (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest).
- 67 A non-exhaustive list is as follows: Ghérasim Luca, *Quantitativement aimée* (Bucharest: Les Éditions de l'Oubli, 1944); Trost and Luca, *Dialectique de la dialectique*; Luca, *Le vampire passif* (Bucharest: Les éditions de l'Oubli, 1945); Gellu Naum, *Medium* (Bucharest: Polirom, 1945); Paul Păun, *Marea Palidă* (Bucharest: Editura Moderna, 1945); Virgil Teodorescu, *Butelia de Leyda* (Bucharest: Tipografia Bucovina, 1945); G. Naum, *Spectrul longevității, 122 cadavre* (Bucharest: Colectia Suprrealista, 1946); Gh. Luca, *Le secret du vide et du plein* (Bucharest: Edition Infra-Noir, 1947); V. Teodorescu, *Au lobe du sel* (Bucharest: Edition Infra-Noir, 1947).
- 68 For more detail on Romanian avant-garde journals, see: Vladimír Udrescu, 'Les avant-postes de l'avant-garde', *Revue Roumaine* 10/12 (1981): pp. 140–51.
- 69 For example: St. Roll, *Moartea vitea Eleonorei*, 1930 (with illustrations by Brauner); Ilarie Voronca, *Zodiac*, 1930 (with illustrations by Maxy); A. Zarembo, *Deschidere*, 1933 (with illustrations by Perahim); Sasa Pană, *Sadismus adevarului*, 1936 (with illustrations by, among others, Brauner, Janco, and Man Ray).
- 70 The sole 1932 issue of *Muci* (*Snot*) may be regarded as a Dada-Surrealist gesture of the sort. Contributors included Păun, Luca, J. Perahim, Freddy Goldstein, and A. Baranga.
- 71 For example, Luca, *Le secret du vide et du plein* (Bucharest: Edition Infra-Noir, 1947); V. Teodorescu, *La provocation* (Bucharest: Edition Infra-Noir, 1947). For more detail on Romanian avant-garde poetry of the time, see: Ion Pop, *Avantgardismul poetic românesc* (Bucharest: Ed. pentru Literatura, 1969), especially pp. 237, 276; Valentin F. Mihăescu, 'Suprrealismul românesc contexte și interpretări', in V.F. Mihăescu, *Țîmp și mod* (Bucharest: Cartea Romaneasca, 1983), pp. 139–81.
- 72 Trost and Luca, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, p. 17.
- 73 Trost and Luca, *Présentation de la graphies colorée, de cubomanies et d'objets*, exhibition catalogue, Sala Brezoianu (Bucharest, 1945).
- 74 Trost and Luca, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, p. 17.
- 75 Trost and Luca, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, p. 17.
- 76 Árpád Mezei, 'Introduction', in *Skupina Ra Czechoslovak Surrealists* (the 20<sup>th</sup> Exhibition of the European School), exhibition catalogue (31 August–14 September 1948).
- 77 Trost and Luca, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, p. 17.
- 78 André Breton and Marcel Duchamp (eds.), *Le surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Maeght Editeur, 1947).
- 79 'The idea of a steady contact and exchange between Budapest

and Bucharest as well as between New York and Tokyo matches entirely our way of thinking about the international activity of the Surrealist movement. As far as the essence of this activity is concerned, it seems to me that until today we have put too much emphasis on the artistic or political side of our revolutionary language and that we have almost completely neglected the resources of our power over the world that are strictly surrealist (unpredictable, indefinite, wildly surprising). Gh. Luca, letter to Árpád Mezei (March 1947) (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest).

80 Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu, 'Inventatorii banderolei', in Gellu Naum (ed.), *Teribilul Interzis* (Col. suprarealista) (Bucharest: Văcărescu, 1945), pp. 87–95.

81 Research interview with Éva Erdélyi, August 1982 (manuscript).

82 Members of the Kraków group Młodych Plastyków (T. Brzozowski, Z. Grochot, T. Kantor, J. Skarzynski) could also be associated with this trend. See: Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Młode malarstwo polskie (1944–1975)* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975), pp. 5–41.

83 Trost and Luca, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, pp. 30–31.

84 Kállai, *A természet rejtett arca*; Béla Hamvas, 'Martyn Ferenc gyűjteményes kiállítása a Képzőművészeti Főiskolán', *Sorsunk* 6/2 (November 1946): p. 102.

85 The Ra Group contacted the group around the Austrian Surrealist journal *Plan*. Ludvík Kundera, letter to Árpád Mezei (1 September 1947) (property of Árpád Mezei, Budapest).

86 A 1942 illegal publication by the Czech Surrealists was entitled *Broken Dolls* (*Roztrhané panenky*).

